The above photograph is from the recent show ‘Still,’ a collection of photographs from Patrick Hogan recently exhibited in the Gallery of Photography in Dublin. It was described by Colin Graham as a gallery of work that ‘perceives moments at which the sense of being is formed through the act of seeing, and it knows and accepts that these moments will appear incoherent, even broken.’[1] This

quote encapsulates what first attracted me to the photograph. It is visually appealing yet, in terms of meaning, distancing. Through the act of looking you expect to draw some sense of meaning or information from the piece, however ambiguity seems to surround the whole image. The identity and history of the man is unclear, his clothes and stance are also somewhat unusual, as is the use of lighting and colour.

This photo seems very personal, a portrait of an individual at a particular moment in time and place, a ‘still’ image. In this context, this piece of photography

is evocative of the work of Susan Sontag, in particular her theory of the ‘new visual code.’ Susan Sontag argues that photographs are interpretations of reality, with a direct link to a real time or event when a moment was captured. She suggests that photographs are depictions of ‘still’ memories, moments in time that are forever frozen, imprisoned realities. This is reflected within the photograph. However ambiguous, the image is visually immortalised and possesses an eternal link to some kind of reality. According the Gallery of Photography’s website, Hogan’s work is ‘questioning of

whether it is possible to develop a meaningful visual understanding of his intimate and immediate world’[2]. This interpretation of ‘Still’ is also reflective of Sontag’s work in considering the role of the photograph in terms of perception and consumption, through the viewer and the image.

Susan Sontag argues that when a moment is captured in photograph it is assigned a new meaning. It gains another identity with individuals each identifying with the photo in their own subjective manner. This is especially true of this particular photograph. This photograph is intended as an

artistic piece, which means it attains a certain meaning. ‘Normal’ photographs that are consumed by audiences are designed to depict or reflect a memory or event. However this photograph is intended to carry some form of artistic merit, it is shaped to encourage debate and instil some sort of emotion within the spectator. Thus, this photo gains a number of new identities purely because of the context of which it was taken.

Sontag’s work also resonates with other aspects of this photo, such as it having a single protagonist with which to identify with. The man in

the photograph encourages an urge within the spectator to have some sense of participation or experience in his life, who or what motivated him to be photographed in this manner. Sontag states that photography has ‘become one of the principal devices for experiencing something, for giving an appearance of participation’[3]. This is one of the most attractive aspects of this photo, the desire to participate within the life created within it, to know and experience its meaning.